

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM



No. 106

NOVEMBER 5TH, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

I have received from a reliable source on the Continent further particulars about the outspoken sermons by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Münster, to which reference was made three weeks ago (C.N.-L. No. 103).

## BOLD STAND BY A GERMAN BISHOP

The first sermon by Count Galen, the Bishop of Münster, was preached shortly after a heavy bombardment of the city from the air. A few days later all the Roman Catholic orders in the province of Westphalia were dissolved and a number of prominent Roman Catholics imprisoned. The Bishop in his first sermon said that the city had suffered much at the hands of those whom he characterised not as "enemies" but as "opponents in the war" (*Kriegsgegner*), and hastened to add that in the same week the city had been attacked by the enemy within. He could no longer keep silence, because no German citizen any longer had security and justice was abolished. If he was charged with disrupting the unity of the nation, his reply was that it was not he but the Gestapo that was doing this. It was a matter that concerned all Christians. All knew of a man who had rendered signal service to the nation in the last war and had been for several years in a concentration camp. (The reference was to Pastor Niemöller, who, it is reported, has been transferred to the concentration camp at Dachau.) If things went on in this way Germany, in spite of all its victories, would collapse from inner decay.

A week later the Bishop returned to the same theme, and declared that the injustice committed cried to heaven. There was no longer any law in Germany. Christians must stand fast, and become the strong anvil on which all hammers would break. In his third sermon the Bishop dealt with the spread of the practice of euthanasia. In his diocese a number of patients had been taken away from asylums and hospitals, and their relatives told that they had died from pneumonia. Everyone knew that they had been murdered. There was still a penal law in Germany by which anyone who knew of a case of murder and did not denounce it to the authorities was himself guilty; he had, therefore, announced these murders to all the authorities whom he could reach. The situation had become one in which with the consent of the national leaders all the ten commandments were being violated. There was much talk about national community, but there could be no community with those responsible for these things, and he refused any kind of fellowship with them.

The Bishop sent a telegram of protest to Hitler, which was turned over to Himmler, whereupon the Bishop wrote to Hitler to say that he could not consent to Himmler who was responsible for these crimes, being judge in his own cause. It is said that Himmler wanted to have the Bishop shot, but that Hitler decided to leave him alone because of his powerful influence in Westphalia. It is believed that Hitler has taken steps to restrain the more extreme enemies of the Church in the party, and has decided that no further measures should be taken against the Church for the present.



## THE SUPPLEMENT ON RUSSIA

The writer of the Supplement is a Russian, who left the country in 1923, while he was still a school-boy. He lived for eight years in Berlin, where he continued his education. After that he studied philosophy and sociology at the French university of Strasbourg, and then joined the Russian Academy attached to the Sorbonne in Paris, where his views, which had been anti-Christian, underwent a change. He began the study of theology and became assistant to Professor Bulgakov as a teacher of Christian dogmatics. He was engaged in research in this country when the war broke out, and has remained here since. He is the author of the letter which was quoted in C.N.-L. No. 91. You will no doubt agree that this interpretation of Russia is of exceptional interest.

## LOCAL INITIATIVE

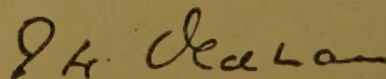
A letter from a vicar in north London tells of a public meeting held recently on the lines of the Sword of the Spirit, though not under its auspices. All the local Churches, eleven in number, including the Roman Catholics, co-operated. About 500 people were present and 120 of these enrolled themselves as members of groups to equip themselves with a fuller knowledge of social conditions and problems. The number has grown to 160 and is still increasing. Ten groups are meeting to study the five points in the letter issued by the heads of the Churches. Probably not more than five per cent. of those who have enrolled have ever been members of such a group before. The groups are led by laymen. The clergy are members, but are trying to keep a vow of silence. It is proposed in the New Year to have a conference of all the groups and to draw up a local plan of action in the light of the knowledge gained. The local clergy in this area are also making contact with defence units, the home guard, the A.F.S., etc., and arranging for meetings at which there will be opportunity of learning from different points of view and different types of experience.

## THE NEWS-LETTER CHANGES ITS ADDRESS

Arlosh Hall, where through the generosity of Manchester College the News-Letter has been comfortably established for a year, has been requisitioned by the Government, and we have had to vacate it. Miss Iredale did everything that was humanly possible, first to avert the blow, and then to secure as long a period of grace as possible. We have known for some weeks that we should have to move, but I have not referred to the matter until we could give a new address. Through the kindness of Balliol College we have secured a house admirably adapted for our purpose. For some time it was uncertain whether we could obtain entry by the date when we had to give up Arlosh Hall, but all the difficulties have been surmounted and we are now installed in our new headquarters. The new address is

21, NORTHMOOR ROAD, OXFORD.

Yours sincerely,

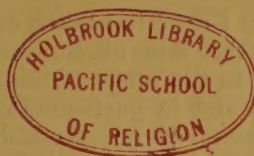


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## THE REVELATION OF RUSSIA

By E. LAMPERT

As I write these lines events are taking place which will decide both the fate of Russia and the fate of Europe for a long time to come. And our hearts, the heart of every Russian, and perhaps of every English man and woman, beats with the heroic defenders of my Russian fatherland.

In the blood-stained brotherhood of peoples horizons are widened and deepened. The West and East of a single world are united once again. England, who to-day bears the torch of European civilisation, has met Russia. This meeting cannot be regarded merely as a matter of military expediency; it is a creative meeting, which is destined to give birth to a new age. Between the East and the West, between Europe and Asia, stands Russia, uniting in herself two streams in the history of the world. And to Russia belongs a central part in this process of unification, in this historical synthesis. She too must overcome her isolation—she must go out into the breadth of the world. The Revolution, in spite of its international character, seemed to cut Russia off from Europe and drive her to Asia. The dark eastern forces in her were victorious. But an ultimate result of the present war will be the issue of Russia from her state of isolation: and her alliance with Britain is the beginning of this decisive process.

### THE RUSSIAN AFFIRMATION OF WHOLENESS

I want to dwell on two features of the Russian people which must be kept in mind, if her destiny and calling are to be understood. The first is an acute affirmation of wholeness, opposition to all

separation, division, differentiation of life into categories and spheres. This is strikingly reflected in the structure of the Russian land itself, in which there are no alternating and complex mountains and valleys, no formulating boundaries. The Russian element flows over a vast plain. It always disappears into infinity, reaches out to the ultimate limit of all things. The creative life of the Russian does not lie in the building up of civilisation, the achievement of obligatory standards in knowledge, morals, law, art, etc., but in the quest of the sources of life, of the transfiguration of the world, of the ultimate and absolute. Hence the capacity of the Russian for radical experiments of which the European, too clearly formulated, too differentiated, too fettered by his limitations and traditions, is not capable.

### THE UNIVERSALISM OF THE RUSSIAN SPIRIT

The other feature is the peculiar attitude of the Russian to Europe. Here the universalism of the Russian spirit is expressed, his capacity to experience and live out as his own everything great in the world. Dostoevsky wrote: "To the Russian Europe is as dear as Russia . . . Europe was our fatherland as Russia was. It is not possible to love Russia more than I do, but I never reproached myself that Venice, Rome, Paris, London, their treasures and their whole history, are dearer to me than Russia. Oh, these miracles of God's world are dear to the Russians, and even dearer than to them themselves (the Europeans) . . . Russia alone—for a hundred years now—does not live for herself, but solely and only for



Europe." And thus Russia has taken on herself and bears the fate of Europe. Herein lies the key to the understanding of Russia's destiny, and in particular of the great Revolution. Is not Russia's present war against Germany the symbol of her identification with and sacrifice for Europe?

## THE CLIMAX OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Since the Revolution, Russia has become the country of the final triumph of society. Here she followed to the end the path on which Europe entered, the path of Humanism and Enlightenment. These defined the face of the contemporary world. The Enlightenment was born in England, the land of Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Newton, Boyle, Berkeley, Hume. It established its "Novum Organum," asserted man in his power over being, affirmed the might of the economic and social man. It was the beginning of a new age. On this soil a new world was created, a world of self-affirming human work, a world of projects and programmes—programmes in place of prophecies. England has never ceased to be the land of the Enlightenment, but she never followed this path to the end. Russia, whose culture never knew Humanism, went to the end, revealed all the chasms and peaks of the destiny of Europe. It was her sacrifice, a mad and terrible sacrifice. It was the mad dream of the revolutionary man finally to subdue the whole of existence through his science and economics. In the Russian Revolution and in Russian Communism both the terrible guilt and the truth of European Humanism are revealed.

## THE ATTEMPT TO INTEGRATE LIFE

Russian Communism is above all the acquisition of a unity and a centre in life. The world of West-European democracy is a world of almost complete freedom—freedom of thought, art, religion—of the whole of culture. But this freedom has

become aimless; this culture has no centre. Western culture recalls more than anything else the Babylonian confusion of tongues. And this confusion is even affirmed on principle as the spiritual foundation of democracy. At the same time our world thirsts for wholeness, thirsts for the truth, and it will not rest until it has found a uniting central focus of life. The struggle for dogma is more characteristic for all, even anti-religious, movements to-day than the classical adogmatism of the Liberal school. This is especially striking if the younger and older generations be compared. Russia answers the need for a single centre in life.<sup>1</sup>

The rediscovery of this centre of life has become the source of new creativity. The revolution of the workers and peasants reveals the creative calling of man in and over the world: man is a creator, and the world is work and a workshop. It is only through work and creation that man can overcome the pain of existence. And this is the eternal truth to which the destiny of the workers and peasants in the revolution witnesses, the truth which is revealed in Humanism.

Communism is inspired by the desire to create one all-embracing classless society. It is the absolutism of society because everything exists for the sake of society. But society is a community—that is, the equality of all in the unity of all. And Russian communist society has become a negative revelation of the religious ideal of the Russian Church. The Russian always thinks in the category of unity of being and the unity of men. Russian socialism is therefore the expression of the search for universal salvation, the reverse side of Russian religious collectivism.

It must be realised that the Revolution brought a great and unique gift to Russia: a new consciousness of unity, the sharing of the whole population in its history, the calling of all the masses to the struggle for a new life. She has never possessed this gift in such a measure as she does now.

<sup>1</sup> It may be noted that in Russia 50 per cent. of all the active, constructive and creative power comes from young people.



But in Russia bourgeois Liberalism, with its individualism chained to personal interests, its individual virtues, attachments and securities, *never* took root. Here the most conservative and the most revolutionary elements are at one. The Russian Revolution is but a symptom and an acute manifestation of this feature. Its recognition is therefore above all the recognition of the positive meaning of the collapse of the old world, the recognition that the old bourgeois society is definitely in danger of complete disintegration. And the conscience of the West European faces the Russian Revolution as an inevitable reality from which there is no escape.

### THE CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIANITY

When the painful question of the attitude of Christianity to the communist Revolution is put, this is what emerges as most decisive: will Christianity break with the bourgeois capitalist world? Will the humiliating opportunism of Christians be overcome? Will "bourgeois Christianity," or rather that which is expressed by this horrible combination of words, cease to exist? Will Christians rise against the power of money over human life? Will they return to Christ and realise that the symbol of "bread" should take the place of the symbol of "money"? The social and economic problem in all its scope, as the question of the new world, the new man, the new life, the question of the changing of the very place of man in the world and in history was radically put by the communist Revolution. It is not a political event so much as a social and spiritual one. And it is not so much the political revolution which should be invoked, as the revolution against the monstrous domination of power-politics over human life. Not only the spiritual but also the economic should have primacy over the political in so far as the latter is a result of the effervescence of the human passions of avarice and hate. The Russian Revolution rises against the falsehood of politics, and herein lies its truth: although it has itself created new and vicious politics, and this is its tragedy.

### THE GUILT OF COMMUNISM

The Russian Revolution and Russian Communism are also stained with guilt. The communist dream of a new happy life is not only truth but also demonism. This demonism makes the terrible attempt to render economic existence the sole reality of man's life, and thus debases his dignity. The elementary necessity of economic life cannot be questioned, moreover it must be affirmed. Nobody who wants to deny this necessity has the right to assert the ultimate value of human life. But we cannot recognise only stark hunger as the sole reality, and in its name deny man's spiritual vocation. Russian Communism, like the Russian Revolution, has therefore an anti-religious and anti-Christian character. It denied God, denied the Spirit, denied the supreme meaning of life. There is no need to close one's eyes to this or to explain it away apologetically, although like all authentic atheism, Russian atheism is complex and tragic. But it is false to conclude from this that Christians should simply deny the communist Revolution, recognise no truth in it, range themselves on the side of "counter-revolution." It is absurd to speak of the Christian character of those societies and states, of the kinds of civilisation, which are to-day crashing in ruins. The Christians are terribly late. The initiative has fallen out of their hands—they had it, probably, only in the Middle Ages. They should never have left it to the atheists to realise social justice: there was only one way of avoiding it—to realise this social justice themselves—and to realise it without animosity or revenge, without casting down the values of the spirit. There is nothing more false or fatal for Christianity than the negation of, or the struggle against this social aspect of the Communist Revolution. This makes the whole struggle against Communism extremely equivocal and suspicious. But Christians cannot conform to the means used by the communist Revolution, to its denial of the Spirit, and optimistically overlook the sinful paths of this revolution.



## RUSSIA AND THE CHURCH

It must not be forgotten that in the course of its whole rich history the Russian people lived by religion, by its religious revelation and its Church. Russia was called "Holy Russia"—not because the Russian people were holy—no, they were a very sinful people—but because it lived spiritually by the ideals of holiness and Christian faith. In its "vices" it is bound to the things of the earth; in its "virtues," however, it aspires to heaven. The western man, on the other hand, was formed by "virtues" which preserved his social position, his property and security, and these were grounded and justified in religion. The Russian people in their destiny show and prove, sometimes, as to-day tragically and paradoxically, that true life is only spiritual life, and that true civilisation is only civilisation founded on spiritual principles. Her allies should therefore realise that the only true and real path to Russia is the path through that which is her greatest reality—her Church. This must be faced practically and realistically in all its implications. Yet now over Soviet Russia there hangs the terrible banner of anti-religious propaganda—"religion is opium for the people." Religion is not dead, for it cannot be destroyed; but as those who live it die out, and in the face of the Government's direction of the education of youth, how can its very existence not be threatened? In this situation something had to happen—something which would tear out the

very depth of contemporary Russian life. I am bold to say this *is* happening; it is the struggle in which Russia is now engaged. Beneath its thunder and earth-shaking, though not apart from them, something is taking place which has more reality for her destiny, is more decisive and more essential than the war itself and all the cries round Russian Communism.

For some time in Soviet Russia the process has been going on of the re-discovery of the values of Russian spiritual culture, with everything which it created and by which it lived in the moments of its greatest inspirations.<sup>1</sup> This process went on under the flag of "Nationalisation of the Revolution," "Rehabilitation of history," "Acquisition of national unity" (Stalin's constitution). And this was a sign of tremendous *spiritual* stirrings. The working and creative life of Soviet Russia, born in agony and endless struggle, by raising its inner spiritual standard is becoming the road to a new Christian Catholic civilisation. Through all the achievements, disruptions and tragedy of the Revolution and the communist building up of society, visions of the New City have visited Russia. They call, attract, inspire to work and the exploits of creation. And that which was hidden yesterday is becoming clear to-day.

Let Russia's allies realise that the entry of the U.S.S.R. into the war has made a dynamic difference to the whole historic outlook: and let their words and actions reflect the consciousness of this fact.

<sup>1</sup> The significance of St. Vladimir (the baptism of Russia), of St. Sergius of Radonezh, St. Alexander Nevsky and others is being re-established.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*

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